



Training and capacity building in rural communities of Ecuador

A study of several community-level sustainable tourism projects in Ecuador reached the following general conclusions:

A detailed analysis of what the community can supply to the tourism enterprise is needed before investments are made. More often than not, local communities may have the capability to raise funds and source out the local resources and talent needed for the building of lodges, canoes, purchasing of motors, and creation of local trail systems. The lack of empowerment observed in the Playa de Oro project may, in part, be due to the amount of infrastructure that was provided free-of-charge to the community.

Communities consistently agree that more funding is needed for training of community members in order to better deliver hospitality and guide services. While most funding agencies have offered short courses, there is universal agreement that training has not been compatible with community needs because of its short duration and lack of responsiveness to cultural and community concerns.

Communities already experienced in the delivery of ecotourism products should be given a much greater role in training programs. Supplying funding for training to experienced communities, and creating apprenticeship programs that offer hands-on experience to trainees will help to inspire greater interest and commitment to the learning process than the use of foreign consultant trainers.

Language training must be considered and incorporated into the native guide training process. Adequate funding and long-term training is necessary if communities are to have multilingual guides. While all guides need not be multilingual, there is little question that local communities will be much more successful in their sustainable tourism programs if top-quality community candidates are given access to combined guide/language training programs.

Utilize the existing, local sustainable tourism industry in the training process. Too often experienced local businesses are not asked to assist in the training of people from local communities. Qualified, local trip leaders from the private sector can provide an important link to communities, and perform the work of outside consultants with much more depth and responsiveness than foreign consultants. Their knowledge of how to work with tourists in the local context, deal with emergencies, trouble-shoot, and manage special visitor issues related to the local ecosystem can help the native guides to better understand the entire process of group management.

Hospitality training programs must be long-term. Fifteen days of hands-on training was suggested as a minimum time frame for community members to begin to fully understand the skills needed to deliver tourism services.

Funding for the establishment of community tourism infrastructure can be an inappropriate use of funding resources. Funding towards lodging and the purchase of such items as canoes and motors for tourism in communities can lead to community dependence, lack of community investment in the tourism enterprise, and poorly maintained facilities that do not attract visitors. As observed by Daniel Koupermann (1997), avoiding charity is fundamental to the success of community participation.



EDUCATION & OUTREACH

MODULE 5

Handout 5.2

Soft loans and other forms of long term credit are needed by communities to help establish their own tourism programs. Remote rural communities lack access to credit worldwide. Revolving loans and microlending are proven formulas for improving rural economies. These techniques should be applied in the field of ecotourism.

The only type of infrastructure specifically unavailable at the community level in Ecuador is good radio systems. In order for community enterprises to improve management of tourism, radios and even satellite phones should be considered by funding agencies. Such communication systems can also assist with other community needs such as health care, medical emergencies, environmental emergencies, and with providing improved inter-community communication regarding issues of governance and cultural survival.

Establishing cooperative enterprises where all work is shared in local communities can be a problem. It is important that the community creates a system that provides a natural incentive to work. Clear accounting of funds received, investments made, and distribution of profits within community tourism projects is also a priority. The creation of small community business partnerships serves to reward those who work the hardest, emphasizes standard business accounting practices, but does not undermine the larger community's ability to benefit from cooperative enterprises, such as the sale of crafts and cabin management.

Funding entities must understand the organizational structure of the community, review various models for community tourism ownership before making any investments, insure that an appropriate model for ownership and accounting of funds is implemented by the community itself, and provide on-site training in accounting skills. One of the most damaging impacts a funding entity can have on a community venture is the insertion of funds before an appropriate community decision making structure is in place. Top-down decision making patterns from the funding entity inevitably begin to overshadow community efforts to manage their own funds. This problem was clearly observed at the project in Playa de Oro. There must be careful consideration by large agencies of how to provide "venture capital" to communities in a form that does not force them to comply with international funding rules and regulations.

Source: Wood, Megan Epler. 1998. *Meeting the Global Challenge of Community Participation in Ecotourism: Case Studies and Lessons from Ecuador*. America Verde Working Papers, No. 2.